



# Summary of Issues

## Zone 2: Gunnison River corridor

Presentation to DENCA Advisory Council  
May 18, 2011

The Gunnison River and its tributaries carved these canyons and cliffs over millions of years



# Water

33 miles: length of Gunnison River thru D-E NCA (*does not distinguish between public and private lands*)

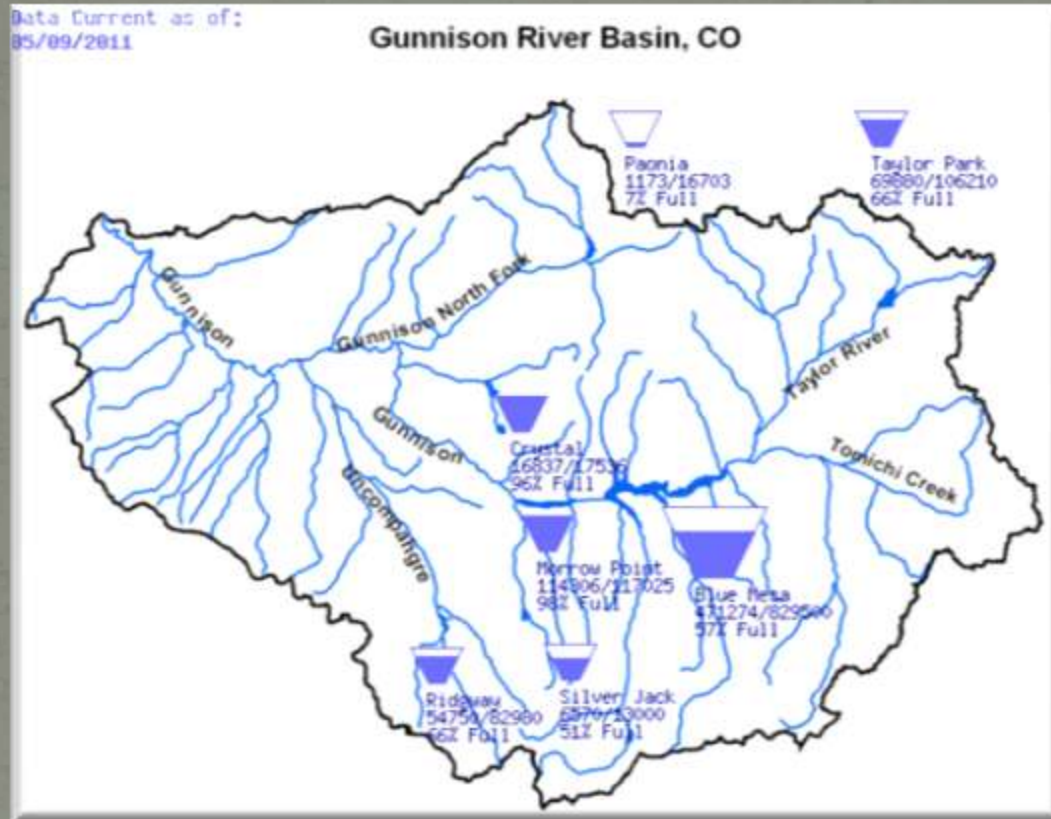
The entire D-E NCA falls into the Gunnison River watershed

Issues related to water:

- Selenium impairment: not currently a result of BLM management
- Flow of the river is highly altered from natural state: largely an issue outside of BLM control



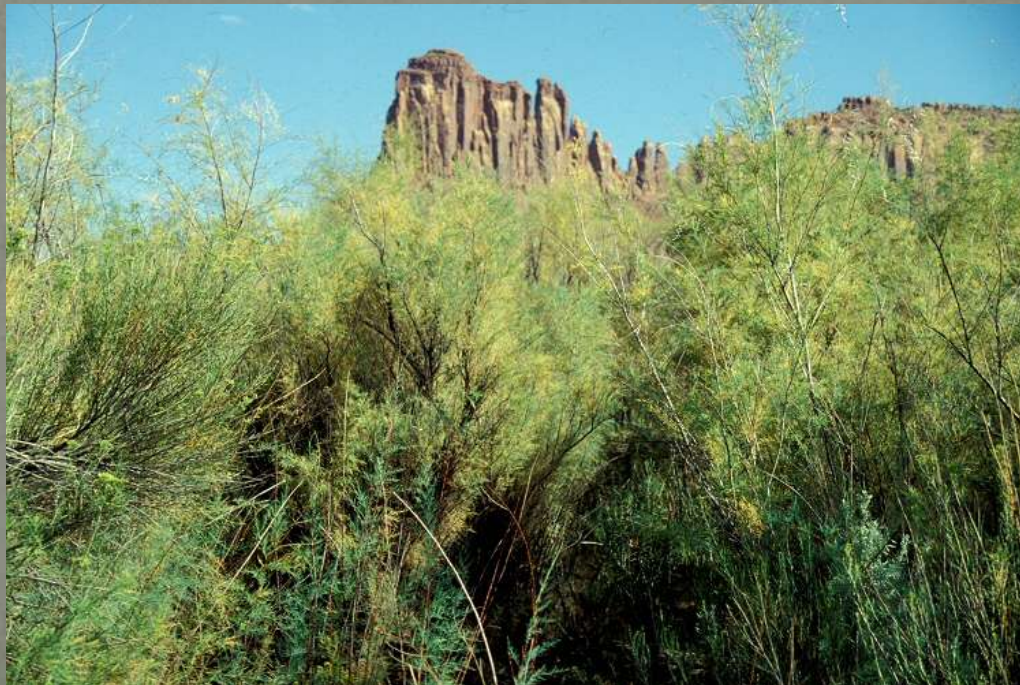
Water flows are controlled by upstream dams and diversions, as well as downstream water rights



This has a major impact on vegetation, fish, wildlife and recreation

# Vegetation

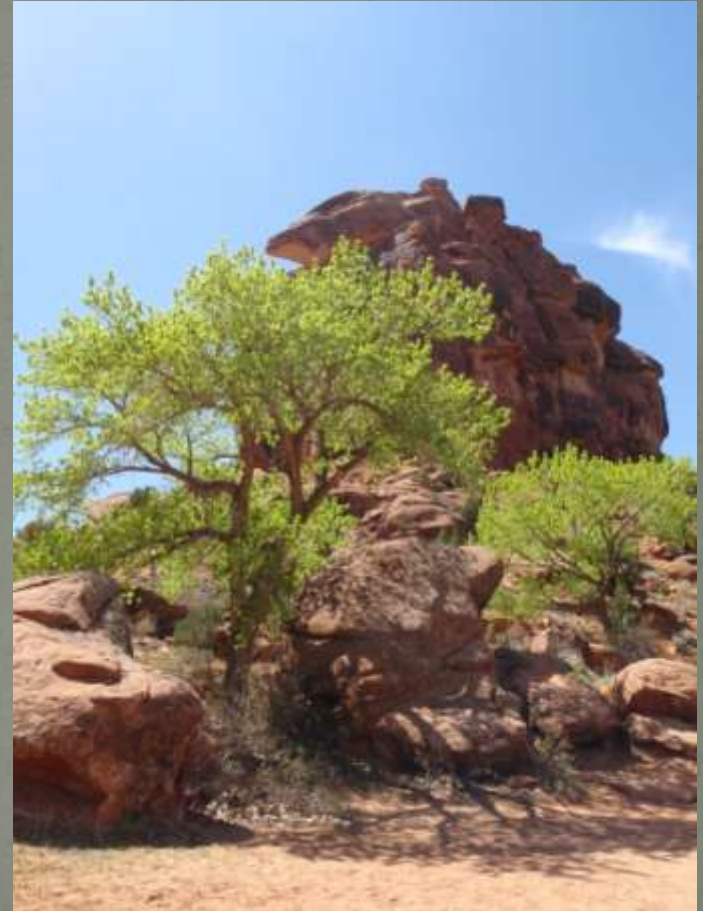
- Vegetative community along the river is highly altered
  - Invasive plants dominate in many areas: Tamarisk, Russian knapweed, cheatgrass, Russian olive and Siberian elm, reed canarygrass
  - Native, wetland vegetation is at less than desirable levels and in many areas is in decline





# Causes of Altered Vegetation

- Water diversions and dam control: reduce the natural variability of the river's flows and shrink the floodplain of the river
  - Makes it difficult for native species like cottonwoods to establish
- Channelization and rip-rapping: reduce flooding and river movement
  - Allows invasive species to flourish where native, wetland species once dominated



# Why is altered vegetation important?

- Omnibus Act says to conserve, protect and enhance riparian, wildlife and natural resources
- Increases risk and frequency of fire
- Reduces the quality of habitat for many wildlife species, particularly species of birds and fish
- Less desirable for recreation and scenery





# What can be done about this problem?

Actions that the BLM can take:

- Cottonwood planting
- Tamarisk removal
- Herbicide treatments

Actions that should improve things over time, regardless of BLM management:

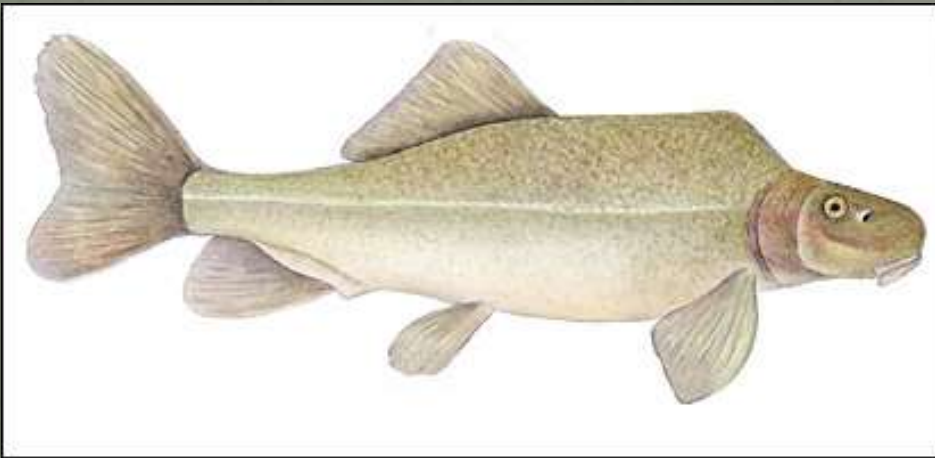
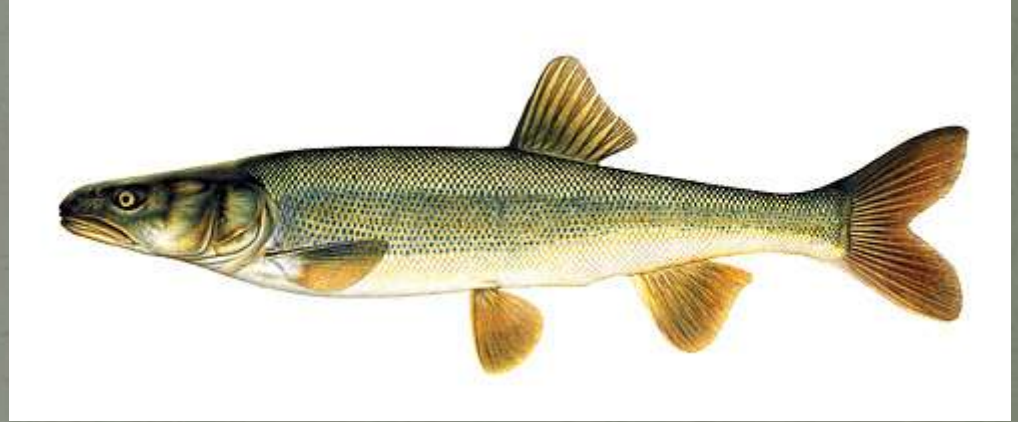
- New water right for Black Canyon National Park
- Introduction of tamarisk beetle





# Federally endangered fish with critical habitat on the Gunnison River

Colorado pikeminnow



Razorback sucker

# Other fish species of interest

- The following fish species are also federally endangered, and have potential habitat on the Gunnison River:

- Bonytail chub
- Humpback chub\*



- The following fish species are *not* federally listed, but are considered BLM sensitive species:
  - Bluehead sucker
  - Roundtail chub
  - Flannelmouth sucker



# Current Effects on fish

- The rarity of native fish species on the Gunnison River is a result of:
  - Dam control/stabilization of stream flow
  - Channelization and rip-rapping along the banks of the river
  - Impacts of dams on fish movement
  - Competition from non-native fish species, such as bass and carp
  - Declining habitat condition, as a result of unnatural water flow and dominance by invasive species
  - Selenium and over-sedimentation could become an issue that leads to further declines

# BLM sensitive wildlife species in zone 2

- BLM sensitive species with the potential to occupy this zone include (C = confirmed within past 10 years, P = not documented but suitable habitat exists):
  - Canyon tree frog (P)
  - Northern leopard frog (C)
  - Desert bighorn sheep (C)
  - Peregrine falcon (C)
  - Bald eagle (C)
  - Neotropical migratory birds (C)
  - Yellow-billed cuckoo (C)
  - Longnose leopard lizard (C)





# Cultural Resources



The Gunnison River was an important corridor for both prehistoric and historic peoples in Western Colorado

In addition to petroglyphs, zone 2 has lithic sites, ancient campgrounds and more, left behind by Native Americans.

# Cultural Resources

The Gunnison River played a major role in the history of European settlement in Western Colorado

- The Gunnison and Whitman expeditions
- The Denver and Rio Grande Railroad
- Orchards and tourism





# Recreation

“The Lower Gunnison River is a quiet meandering stream important to canoeists, rafters, and catfish fishers. Open canyon scenery, scattered with pinon-juniper and cottonwood canopies, give the river traveler much to appreciate. Most scenic is Dominguez Canyon. Its shallow and gentle sloping configuration makes for gentler Class I-II rapids.”

– *Adventure Traveler* website



# River Recreation, by the numbers

- ❑ 4,000 user days annually access the river
- ❑ 75 percent camp overnight along the river
- ❑ 60 percent commercial/40 percent private
- ❑ 15 outfitters currently hold permits
- ❑ Most popular activities:
  1. Canoeing
  2. Rafting
  3. Kayaking
  4. Jet boating and waterfowl hunting





# Distances on the Lower Gunnison

- Confluence Park in Delta to Whitewater – 42 miles (2-3 day trip)
- Confluence Park to Escalante Creek – 14.6 miles
- Escalante Creek to Bridgeport – 13.7 miles
- Bridgeport to Whitewater – 13.7 miles
- Escalante to Whitewater – 27.4 miles (2 day trip)

# Access Issues

- Escalante, Bridgeport and Whitewater access points ALL within the Union Pacific right-of-way.
- BLM/UP working to address safety and improved access, however, there is no formal agreement regarding access
- Confluence Park owned by City of Delta
- Whitewater access owned by Mesa County, maintained by BLM
- The takeouts at Bridgeport and Whitewater are inadequate for rafters



# New access changes recreation patterns

- Bridgeport footbridge brings 7,300 hikers and equestrians to the mouth of the Dominguez Canyon, which previously was largely limited to visitors who came in by river or trespassed.
- Increased usage of the mouth of Dominguez Canyon has changed the setting of the area



# Casual use mining- Rattlesnake Gulch



- Recreational prospecting falls under the BLM's **casual use mining policies**
- In 2009, BLM determined that prospecting at Rattlesnake Gulch had gone beyond casual use due to damage to plants and due to public safety concerns
- Members of the public have called for the BLM to allow recreational prospecting under the new RMP and to work with local users to establish a set of rules governing the use of the area



# Casual use mining- Rattlesnake Gulch

- The Colorado hookless cactus is known to occupy the benches around Rattlesnake Gulch



# Wild and Scenic River Suitability- Gunnison River

Eligibility



Suitability



Designation

Only Congress can  
designate a  
Wild and Scenic River





# ORV's on the Gunnison River

- The BLM identified the following ORVs on the Gunnison River:
  - Recreational
  - Cultural
  - Fish
  - Historical
- Questions to consider
  - Should these ORV's be protected?
  - Is Wild and Scenic River suitability and/or designation the best tool to protect these ORVs?
  - Is there support from non-federal entities that could influence protection of the ORVs?

The End

